

LCQ11: Inbound epidemic prevention and control measures

Following is a question by the Hon Yiu Si-wing and a written reply by the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, in the Legislative Council today (September 1):

Question:

The Government indicated on the 2nd of last month that it would, on the basis of the "vaccine bubble", strengthen the inbound epidemic prevention and control measures (including the arrangement of undergoing compulsory quarantine in quarantine hotels) for persons arriving in Hong Kong from overseas, so as to strengthen the anti-epidemic barrier against importation of cases. Subsequently on the 20th, the Government tightened the relevant requirements further. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it has reviewed if the aforesaid measures have resulted in a shortage of rooms in quarantine hotels; if it has reviewed and the outcome is in the affirmative, of the solutions for that;

(2) given that the Government has, under the place-specific flight suspension mechanism, prohibited civilian passenger flights departing from extremely high-risk places from landing in Hong Kong for several months, resulting in quite a number of Hong Kong people being stranded in places such as Nepal, how often the Government will conduct risk assessments on such places to facilitate timely cancellation of such arrangements; and

(3) given that under the latest arrangement, Hong Kong residents staying in high-risk Group A specified places on the day of boarding for/arrival in Hong Kong or during the preceding 21 days must hold vaccination records recognised by the Hong Kong Government for them to be permitted to board the flights for Hong Kong, but the vaccination records issued by the relevant authorities of some of such places are not recognised by the Hong Kong Government, resulting in quite a number of Hong Kong residents being stranded in such places, what measures the Government has put in place to assist such residents in returning to Hong Kong?

Reply:

President,

To further prevent the importation of COVID-19 cases and reduce contact between arrivals and the local community, the Government fully implemented the Designated Quarantine Hotel (DQH) Scheme and the Designated Transportation Scheme on December 22, 2020, requiring all arrivals from specified places to undergo compulsory quarantine at DQHs. At present, a

total of 36 hotels will provide about 10 000 rooms in the fifth cycle of the DQH Scheme, with the contract period running from September 1 to November 30.

In consultation with the Security Bureau, my reply to the various parts of the question raised by Hon Yiu Si-wing is as follows:

(1) The Government has been closely monitoring the demand for DQH rooms. The Government has already released all available rooms of around 10 800 in DQHs for fourth cycle in August for inbound travellers for booking. As the demand for DQH rooms in September remains similar to that in August, the Government has made arrangements with DQHs with reserve rooms under the fifth cycle to release their reserve rooms in the month of September for booking by inbound travellers. We expect that a total of about 11 000 rooms (including around 1 300 reserve rooms) can be provided in September.

(2) and (3) In view of the latest developments of the global and local COVID-19 epidemic situation, the Government implemented in August various measures to tighten the inbound prevention and control measures for travellers arriving at Hong Kong from overseas places, in order to build an anti-epidemic barrier to prevent the importation of cases. The Government has based on the risk-based principle re-categorised overseas places into high-risk, medium-risk and low-risk groups to implement boarding, quarantine and testing requirements based on the risk levels.

From August 9 onwards, for Hong Kong residents who have stayed in Group A specified places on the day of boarding for Hong Kong or during the 21 days before that day, they can board flights for Hong Kong if they are fully vaccinated and hold a recognised vaccination record (including those issued by Hong Kong, an authority or recognised institution of a country where its national regulatory authority is designated by the World Health Organization as a stringent regulatory authority, Mainland or Macao authorities or an institution recognised by Mainland or Macao authorities, or an authority or recognised institution of a relevant authority or recognised institution of a country with which Hong Kong has reached a recognition agreement arrangement). The relevant persons are subject to compulsory quarantine in designated quarantine hotels for 21 days on arrival at Hong Kong (with six tests to be conducted during the period), subsequent seven-day self-monitoring, and compulsory testing on the 26th day of their arrival at Hong Kong.

Upon implementation of the above arrangements, the previous place-specific flight suspension mechanism for Group A1 specified places is no longer applicable, and the relevant passenger flights are allowed to land in Hong Kong.

The flight-specific suspension mechanism of passenger flights remains effective. The mechanism has been implemented since July 2020 and tightened three times in September, November 2020 and April 2021 respectively. Under the mechanism, if three or more passengers on a passenger flight arriving at Hong Kong are confirmed to have COVID-19 by arrival tests; or two or more passengers on any two flights of the same airline from the relevant original

port within a seven-day period are confirmed to have COVID-19 by arrival tests, the Department of Health would prohibit the passenger flights from the relevant original port of the airline concerned from landing in Hong Kong for 14 days under the mechanism.

As the situation of COVID-19 around the world was evolving rapidly, the Government issued the Red Outbound Travel Alert on all overseas countries/territories based on public health considerations on March 17, 2020. Members of the public are strongly urged to adjust their travel plans and avoid any non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

Hong Kong residents travelling outside Hong Kong who need assistance may call the 24-hour hotline of the Assistance to Hong Kong Residents Unit of the Immigration Department at (852) 1868 or call the 1868 hotline by network data call via the Immigration Department Mobile Application. After receiving enquiries and assistance requests from Hong Kong residents, the Immigration Department will provide relevant information and practicable assistance to the residents according to their wishes, and keep relevant bureaux and departments updated of the assistance requests concerned.

The Government will continue to closely monitor the epidemic situation of different places, and will consider a basket of factors under the risk-based principle, including public health considerations (such as epidemic situation in particular places, testing rate, vaccination rate, volume of travellers and actual imported cases), as well as other local socio-economic factors to adjust the boarding, quarantine and testing requirements for persons arriving at Hong Kong from relevant places based on risk levels as the situation warrants.